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EDITORIAL COMMENT

STATUS RERUM

London, December 10, 1912



THE state of things here in London is, as I see it, as follows:

I find Mr. Yeats the only poet worthy of serious study. Mr. Yeats' work is already a recognized classic and is part of the required reading in the Sorbonne. There is no need of proclaiming him to the American public.

As to his English contemporaries, they are food, sometimes very good food, for anthologies. There are a number of men who have written a poem, or several poems, worth knowing and remembering, but they do not much concern the young artist studying the art of poetry.

The important work of the last twenty-five years has been done in Paris. This work is little likely to gain a large audience in either America or England, because of its tone and content. There has been no "man with a message," but the work has been excellent and the method worthy of our emulation. No other body of poets having so little necessity to speak could have spoken so well as these modern Parisians and Flemings.

There has been some imitation here of their manner and content. Any donkey can imitate a man's manner.

POETRY: *A Magazine of Verse*

There has been little serious consideration of their *method*. It requires an artist to analyze and apply a method.

Among the men of thirty here, Padraic Colum is the one whom we call most certainly a poet, albeit he has written very little verse—and but a small part of that is worthy of notice. He is fairly unconscious of such words as “aesthetics,” “technique” and “method.” He is at his best in *Garadh*, a translation from the Gaelic, beginning:

O woman, shapely as a swan,
On your account I shall not die.
The men you’ve slain—a trivial clan—
Were less than I:

and in *A Drover*. He is bad whenever he shows a trace of reading. I quote the opening of *A Drover*, as I think it shows “all Colum” better than any passage he has written. I think no English-speaking writer now living has had the luck to get so much of himself into twelve lines.

To Meath of the pastures,
From wet hills by the sea,
Through Leitrim and Longford
Go my cattle and me.

I hear in the darkness
Their slipping and breathing.
I name them the bye-ways
They’re to pass without heeding.

Then the wet, winding roads,
Brown bogs with black water;
And my thoughts on white ships
And the King o’ Spain’s daughter.

I would rather talk about poetry with Ford Madox Hueffer than with any man in London. Mr. Hueffer's beliefs about the art may be best explained by saying that they are in diametric opposition to those of Mr. Yeats.

Mr. Yeats has been subjective; believes in the glamour and associations which hang near the words. "Works of art beget works of art." He has much in common with the French symbolists. Mr. Hueffer believes in an exact rendering of things. He would strip words of all "association" for the sake of getting a precise meaning. He professes to prefer prose to verse. You would find his origins in Gautier or in Flaubert. He is objective. This school tends to lapse into description. The other tends to lapse into sentiment.

Mr. Yeats' method is, to my way of thinking, very dangerous, for although he is the greatest of living poets who use English, and though he has sung some of the moods of life immortally, his art has not broadened much in scope during the past decade. His gifts to English art are mostly negative; i. e., he has stripped English poetry of many of its faults. His "followers" have come to nothing. Neither Synge, Lady Gregory nor Colum can be called his followers, though he had much to do with bringing them forth, yet nearly every man who writes English verse seriously is in some way indebted to him.

POETRY: *A Magazine of Verse*

Mr. Hueffer has rarely "come off." His touch is so light and his attitude so easy that there seems little likelihood of his ever being taken seriously by anyone save a few specialists and a few of his intimates. His last leaflet, *High Germany*, contains, however, three poems from which one may learn his quality. They are not Victorian. I do not expect many people to understand why I praise them. They are *The Starling*, *In the Little Old Market-Place* and *To All the Dead*.

The youngest school here that has the nerve to call itself a school is that of the *Imagistes*. To belong to a school does not in the least mean that one writes poetry to a theory. One writes poetry when, where, because, and as one feels like writing it. A school exists when two or three young men agree, more or less, to call certain things good; when they prefer such of their verses as have certain qualities to such of their verses as do not have them.

Space forbids me to set forth the program of the *Imagistes* at length, but one of their watchwords is Precision, and they are in opposition to the numerous and unassembled writers who busy themselves with dull and interminable effusions, and who seem to think that a man can write a good long poem before he learns to write a good short one, or even before he learns to produce a good single line.

Among the very young men, there seems to be a gleam of hope in the work of Richard Aldington, but it is too early to make predictions.

Status Rerum

There are a number of men whose names are too well known for it to seem necessary to tell them over. America has already found their work in volumes or anthologies. Hardy, Kipling, Maurice Hewlett, Binyon, Robert Bridges, Sturge Moore, Henry Newbolt, McKail, Masfield, who has had the latest cry; Abercrombie, with passionate defenders, and Rupert Brooke, recently come down from Cambridge.

There are men also, who are little known to the general public, but who contribute liberally to the "charm" or the "atmosphere" of London: Wilfred Scawen Blunt, the grandest of old men, the last of the great Victorians; great by reason of his double sonnet, beginning—

He who has once been happy is for aye
Out of destruction's reach;

Ernest Rhys, weary with much editing and hack work, to whom we owe gold digged in Wales, translations, transcripts, and poems of his own, among them the fine one to Dagonet; Victor Plarr, one of the "old" Rhymers' Club, a friend of Dowson and of Lionel Johnson. His volume, *In The Dorian Mood*, has been half forgotten, but not his verses *Epitaphium Citharistriae*. One would also name the Provost of Oriel, not for original work, but for his very beautiful translations from Dante.

In fact one might name nearly a hundred writers who have given pleasure with this or that matter in rhyme. But it is one thing to take pleasure in a man's work and another to respect him as a great artist.

Ezra Pound